DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 479 376 CS 512 385

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TITLE	Getting All Teachers To Use Reading/Writing To Help Students Learn Subject Matter.
PUB DATE	2003-05-00
NOTE	15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association (48th, Orlando, FL, May 4-8, 2003).
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Active Learning; *Classroom Techniques; *Content Area Reading; Elementary Secondary Education; Instructional Effectiveness; Learning Strategies; *Professional Development; *Reading Comprehension; *Reading Strategies; *Reading Writing Relationship
IDENTIFIERS	Instructional Models

ABSTRACT

Generally speaking, reading is not taught beyond the third grade in most school systems. If a student has not mastered reading comprehension skills by the fourth grade, chances are that she/he will struggle with learning in grades four through twelve. Many middle school and high school students lack the ability to use communication skills effectively for the purpose of learning. This paper discusses "MAX" (Motivation, Acquisition, and eXtension) teaching with reading and writing: a rationale and a method. Before discussing MAX teaching, the paper presents an "anticipation guide," a type of worksheet which quizzes teachers on how students learn most effectively. It then discusses "embedded curriculum," in which learning skills are taught in conjunction with course content. The paper states that the essential goal of teachers who use the MAX teaching framework is to level the playing field by raising the bar for all students, which involves creating a classroom environment that provides instruction in building skills to enable improved performance, while at the same time engaging all students in active learning from textbooks and other forms of textual matter. It explains each of the steps of MAX teaching and considers how frequently teachers should use MAX. The paper concludes by outlining how to prepare teachers to use MAX. (Contains 15 references.) (NKA)

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International Reading Association
May 6, 2003

Getting All Teachers to Use Reading/Writing To Help Students Learn Subject Matter

Mark Forget, Nancy Lyle, Maria Spear, Kim Reinhart-Clark

ED 479 376

MAX Teaching with Reading and Writing

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ANTICIPATION GUIDE: How Students Learn Most Effectively

Before Reading: In the space to the left of each statement, place a check mark (√) if you agree or think the statement is true.

During or After Reading: Add new check marks or cross through those about which you have changed your mind. Keep in mind that this is not like the traditional "worksheet." You may have to put on your thinking caps and "read between the lines." Use the space under each statement to note the page, column, and paragraph(s) where you have found information to support your thinking.

___1. Students need to participate actively in their learning in order for the material learned to become personal knowledge.

___2. Learning to read in vocational and academic classrooms could be more effective than through remedial reading classes.

___3. Most students from kindergarten through twelfth grade can practice critical thinking about virtually any subject matter.

___4. In most school-related learning situations, students and teachers retain much more from what they discuss than from what they read.

___5. Teachers should rely heavily on the textbook as a tool to help students learn their subject matter.

___6. Through daily repetition of practice in using communication skills to learn and process new information, students can become autonomous learners.

____7. Reading is thinking – and students' scores on most state-mandated standardized tests would improve if teachers were to provide students with guided practice in reading/thinking skills in their daily routine of course content instruction.

HOW STUDENTS LEARN MOST EFFECTIVELY[1]

Research suggests that we remember about 10% of what we read, 20% of what we hear, 30% of what we see, and 70% of what we, ourselves, say. How much do we remember of all the books we read in college? Is 10% a good estimate? We read the books and most likely did comprehend what we read and held on to the knowledge for a test, paper, or discussion. Most of that retention was momentary understanding but was not processed as personal knowledge for ourselves. Comprehending what you read and long-term retention are definitely two separate entities.

Research also tells us that "85% of the knowledge and skills presented to students in school comes to them in some form of language: teachers talking, materials to read, films to watch and listen to, and so forth." If students only retain 20% of what they hear, then is frequent lecture an effective way to teach, and is it an effective use of learners' time? If we remember 70% of what we say, is it any wonder that teachers who often lecture seem so knowledgeable?

Percentages aside, teachers, especially, know how beneficial it is to talk to someone else about subject matter. As good learners, we know from experience that when we discussed with someone else, we clarified subject matter, made connections among points of the subject matter that we might not have realized before, and mentally and verbally interacted with the ideas of our partner(s) in the discussion.

These same concepts apply to our students. An interactive learning situation is superior to the passive reception of information of the traditional classroom. When students work cooperatively to construct the meaning from a piece of text, they learn more deeply, and they are helping one another learn how to learn. In order to motivate students to think about, learn, and discuss what they have read, we should use a framework of instruction that allows students to be active in their own learning.

Generally speaking, reading is not taught beyond the third grade in most school systems. If a student has not mastered reading comprehension skills by the fourth grade, chances are that s/he will struggle with learning in grades four through twelve. Many middle school and high school students lack the ability to use communication skills effectively for the purpose of learning. Teachers and parents often assume that these skills will develop by themselves over time. The fact is that they rarely do.

One solution is *embedded curriculum*, in which learning skills are taught in conjunction with course content. Students need to be provided with appropriate modeling of language and thought processes, and, since this is often not accomplished in the home, then it must be done in the school. The problem is that most classrooms do not provide this modeling. Faced with the ubiquitous pressure of standardized tests, teachers often resort to rapid "covering" of the material they are supposed to teach, with little regard for whether students are developing appropriate brain programs for learning, thinking, and problem solving. In most schools, the preferred pedagogical techniques are teacher lecture, worksheet skill drills, and reading to answer end-of-chapter comprehension questions. Teachers who use these methods can say that they "covered" what they were

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[1] Excerpted from Forget, Mark A. and Morgan, Raymond F. (1997) A brain compatible learning environment for improving student metacognition. *Reading Improvement*, v. 34, no. 4, Winter, 1997.

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supposed to cover in the curriculum. The results are that students perceive school as a passive, often boring, learning experience in which they seldom see how different subjects relate to either reality or to one another, or even how what was learned last week in a given subject area relates to what was learned this week.

Textbooks are valuable tools. Though the textbook should not be the only information source in a class, the textbook is an often-neglected or misused tool for learning. The fact is that much of the content being measured by standardized tests is to be found in textbooks. The basic themes of a course and the vocabulary of the discipline are to be found there.

The problem is that, even though many of the questions on standardized tests require interpretive reading, most students are not being exposed to thoughtful interpretation of text. Worksheets and end-of-chapter comprehension questions require only the most basic decoding skills to answer. Students who process text through these methods rarely do the kind of reading you are doing right now – thoughtfully processing the argument as it was logically presented by the author. Instead, students often begin in the middle or end of the reading, flipping pages back and forth to skim for bold print words that might give them the clue as to where they might find "the right answer."

Any person, regardless of age, can perform higher order thinking about even the most abstract ideas if s/he has a basic understanding of the concept. When teachers think that students cannot perform higher order thinking about subject matter, what they do not realize is that the problem really lies not in the students, but in the students' preparation for the thinking. Once students have conceptualized the basics, they can more readily perform higher order thinking skills about the subject matter. Many teachers practice assumptive teaching – thinking that because they themselves understand certain concepts, the students will also understand them in the same ways. One important source of course-specific vocabulary and basic conceptual information about course content is a textbook. However, it is important that the textbook be used properly, and that other information sources are also used appropriately.

A framework of instruction for acquisition of literacy skills along with content area knowledge includes three-steps that facilitate active engagement of students, allowing the brain to function at its highest levels. Before reading, teachers can motivate students by helping students to recall and add to their prior knowledge of the topic to be studied, and to set their own purposes for reading. During the reading, teachers can help students maintain their purposes and monitor their own comprehension while acquiring new information and new learning skills. After the reading, teachers can facilitate higher-order thinking by students, allowing for the thinking to extend beyond the text.

Interaction between student and self, student and teacher, and among students, *in the context of the subject area* is critical in developing these abilities. Emphasis is on learning through guided practice in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking. All these are practiced in the classroom on a daily basis, while students participate in an active process of learning from textbooks, from each other, and from other materials. Students of all ability levels, in all content areas, benefit from this form of deeper learning. In addition, the skills acquired in conjunction with the content instruction are transferable to other learning experiences because one important thing being acquired is the process of learning itself. Students thus develop naturally positive brain programs that they can apply in all future learning situations.

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MAX TEACHING WITH READING AND WRITING: A RATIONALE AND METHOD[2]

The only way to learn how to read is by reading, and
The only way to get students to read is by making reading easy.

Frank Smith (1988), Joining the Literacy Club

Literacy, in the most basic sense of the word, is the ability to read and write. But such an ability entails so much more than simply deciphering combinations of letters on a page or placing words on paper in a certain order. Literacy involves listening, thinking, and speaking in such a way that information and ideas are processed and communicated to the benefit of self and society.

Few would deny the importance of literacy skills in either the academic world or the business world. Yet, schools beyond the early grades often do not see the role they could play in developing and expanding literacy skills in students, and so they relegate that duty to others. Standardized tests such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) provide evidence of this failure to stimulate students to achieve higher levels of literacy skills. According to NAEP tests, a significant portion of middle grades and high school students read at or below the basic reading levels.

Disparity in Literacy Skills

The poor performance in reading scores that many American middle and high school students consistently earn on state and national tests result not from inadequate test preparation but from a lack of basic literacy skills that in other times and circumstances might have been learned at home. It is no surprise that schools situated in upper middle class neighborhoods consistently score higher than those in poorer areas, whether rural or urban. The fact of the matter is that children who come from homes in which literacy (the ability to read, write, speak, listen, and think well) is valued and practiced are the ones who consistently score higher on standardized tests. These are children who come from homes in which books are commonplace, magazines are found on the coffee table, and a newspaper lies on the driveway in the morning. They see their parents using literacy to learn, communicate, and conduct business. To such children, literacy skills tend to come easily, and thus they score highly on standardized tests. On the other hand, children from homes that have little print matter available and in which the TV and/or siblings are raising the children (often because financial circumstances require the parents, or a single parent, to be away much of the time working two jobs)

[2] Forget, Mark A. (2003, in press.). *MAX Teaching with reading & writing: How all teachers can maximize students' understanding of their subject matter.*

tend to score lower on the same tests. Schools can make up for this disparity, but to do so, they will have to rethink how they teach children.

What Do Reading Tests Measure?

We must not be too quick to criticize elementary schools for the job they are doing. Though schools vary in their performance, early grades educators are generally doing a good job of teaching students to decode print through the use of phonics and other methods. At grade four, United States students lead the world in the ability to read (learn). It is by eighth and twelfth grades that a negative disparity is found between the scores of American students and those of other industrialized countries.

Tests conducted by the Department of Education's National Assessment of Educational Progress show that more than 60 percent of high school seniors in the United States score at or below the basic level of reading (as compared to the proficient and advanced levels). A scan of NAEP's own literature points out that what is being measured in their tests is the ability of students to perform higher order thinking while they read. The manual that NAEP publishes with their report every two years suggests that when grade level materials are used, students reading at the "basic" reading level should be able to "demonstrate an overall understanding and make some interpretations of the text." Students reading at the "proficient" level should be able to "show an overall understanding of the text which includes inferential as well as literal information." And students reading at the "advanced" level should be able to "describe more abstract themes and ideas." In addition, students reading at the advanced level should be able to "analyze [and] extend the information from the text by relating to their own experiences and to the world." (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1998).

In other words, what the NAEP is measuring is the ability of students to perform higher order thinking while learning. The question is, Are we teaching students how to think? Are we creating the conditions in our classrooms in which students are routinely enabled to analyze, apply, synthesize, and evaluate what they read?

How Schools Can Help Students Acquire Literacy Skills

What can schools do to help middle and high school students improve their achievement in learning? The systematic use of reading and writing to help students learn their subject matter is one answer. Students who are placed in an environment in which they are allowed to pursue learning through the means of reading, writing, discussing in cooperative groups, and thus manipulating ideas to construct meaning are finding that learning does not have to be difficult or boring. Rather, it can be fluid and engaging—even *exciting*. What students in such an environment learn is that, despite their background or home environment, they can succeed as learners. A collateral benefit is that, while students in content area classes read, write, and discuss in order to learn content, they actually improve the thinking skills directly related to higher performance in reading and writing.

What About Students Who Are Reading Below Grade Level?

Reading involves construction of meaning. Modern views of reading suggest that the reader, using the "set of tracks" left by the author and relating it to the reader's prior knowledge, thereby constructs a message. The good news is that students who are reading below grade level, and who do not at a given time have the skills to read a piece of text independently, can read text considerably beyond their diagnosed reading grade level when they have the support of competent peers and/or a facilitating teacher. Students practicing learning through reading in this way can in fact read text that is as much as four years above their diagnosed reading levels (Dixon-Krauss, 1996). The key is having well prepared teachers—teachers who know strategies to help students (a) interpretively process text and (b) work cooperatively to manipulate the ideas and themes of the course,

Students who have previously been frustrated by their lack of literacy skills find that they are able to develop appropriate skills and strategies that can make all the difference. The mediated literacy instruction, which employs cooperative learning, helps such students gain the ability to perform literacy skills autonomously. Stated another way – There is only one way to learn literacy skills, and that is by practicing them…and there is only one way to get students to practice literacy skills, and that is to make it easy for them to do so. That is what **MAX Teaching** is all about.

How MAX Teaching Works

MAX is an acronym that stands for the three steps of a teaching framework that any teacher can use. The acronym stands for **M**otivation, **A**cquisition, and e**X**tension. It's a way to help all students better learn their subject matter and improve their literacy skills. The essential goal of teachers who use the **MAX** teaching framework is to level the playing field by raising the bar for all students. This involves creating a classroom environment that provides instruction in building skills to enable improved performance, while at the same time engaging all students in active learning from textbooks and other forms of textual matter.

Motivation:(the first step)

Much of current research into motivation of students involves two simultaneous and often competing drives within the learner – striving for success and avoidance of failure (Marzano, 2003). What the teacher does in the pre-reading phase is based on the awareness of these two drives.

Each class begins with activities designed to motivate students to become engaged in the learning of content, even if it is content that is difficult or might not otherwise interest them. This first step is accomplished through the systematic use of both individual and cooperative activities that help the teacher to

- find out what the students already know about the topic to be studied,

- assist students in connecting to and seeing the relevance of subject matter,
- provide for increased conceptual understanding for all students,
- introduce and model a literacy-related skill that the students will use to probe text and gather information for development of new understandings, and
- help students establish concrete purposes for actively probing the text.

It is through carefully guided implementation of all of these components that students who otherwise might not have taken an interest in the learning experience are guided to become curious about subject matter and to form a plan for finding new information.

Acquisition (the second step)

Once students have clear purposes for learning, the teacher facilitates guided practice in the learning skill introduced in the Motivation stage of the lesson. (The exact skill to be practiced varies, depending on the needs of the students, the structure and/or difficulty of the text, or on other variables.) In the Acquisition phase of the lesson, each student

- silently reads to interpret and gather information in writing for later discussion,
- actively probes text for acquisition of new content, and
- works toward acquisition of expertise in the practiced literacy skill.

Typically, this part of the class involves silent reading by students as they each gather information to be brought to small-group and whole-class discussion after the reading. In some cases, where student reading abilities are uniformly well below the level of the text, the teacher might read all or a part of the text aloud to the class while students read along silently. However, as early in the school year as possible, students should be allowed to practice mature silent reading to gather information through their own interpretations.

Frequent systematic guided practice in literacy related skills allows students to *acquire* the skills without even being aware that they are doing so. Just as a person acquires fluency in a language through the immersion process by living for some time in a place where the language is spoken, students acquire complex and content-specific literacy-related skills. Acquisition is different than learning – most people who ever tried to "learn" a second language through years of course work cannot speak it. Yet people who were given the opportunity to spend lengthy periods in foreign lands often *acquire* the language without formal training. It is this less observable yet profound form of development that is occurring in a content literacy classroom through immersion in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking about course content.

E**X**tension:(the third step)

The final phase of the lesson framework involves EXtension beyond the text. This takes place through various activities that might include debate, discussion, writing, reorganizing, or otherwise manipulating the ideas that were confronted in the reading. Students meet in small groups and as a whole class to construct meaning from the text.

The teacher, in this phase of the lesson, acts as a facilitator for the higher order thinking that will allow students to (a) synthesize information, connecting new facts and ideas with what they already knew before the lesson; (b) analyze the knowledge newly gained; and (c) think about how to apply what they have learned in real-world circumstances, or even to make an evaluation of the author's argument or underlying intent. It is through such higher order thinking that students develop more complete understandings about new content. It is also through such practice in higher order thinking that students develop the skills and abilities to perform these tasks on their own as independent life-long learners. (Chapter 6 will expand on this phase of the lesson.)

The principles underlying the **MAX** teaching framework have been well researched over many years. The essential components of the use of cooperative learning throughout the first and last phases of the lesson, along with the systematic introduction of skills in which students are given guided practice in the use of language as a tool for thinking, combine to help all students learn how to become effective learners and thinkers. In addition, the **MAX** teaching framework provides a way for upper grade teachers to help compensate for the inadequate language skills development that too many children exhibit.

How Frequently Should Teachers Use Max?

All effective teachers use some form of the three steps that comprise **MAX**. At the beginning of class, most teachers use some form of an "anticipatory set" to get students thinking about the subject matter. The new information is often then "presented" in some format such as a lecture, video, teacher-led discussion, or some other way of communicating information. The presentation of new information is usually followed by some form of check, such as a worksheet or quiz.

Thus, the paradigm shift in using **MAX** as a framework of instruction is easy for most teachers since, with **MAX**, they now become facilitators of their students' active learning through the use of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking in the middle and final phases of class. The teacher acts as a "master learner" among "apprentice learners" in a classroom wherein *the focus is on acquisition of knowledge and skills through guided practice in using literacy skills to process new subject matter.*

Using literacy skills to process new understandings can easily become the central focus of a classroom and can be used as a way to learn any new information. The variety of tested strategies available to teachers is enormous. Researched and proven strategies abound. Thus, practicing literacy skills to learn should not be a once-a-week or once-a-month activity. It can become the routine of a classroom in which students are engaged in making personal meaning from text and discussion every day.

Which Teachers Should Teach This Way?

Teachers who use the **MAX** teaching framework do not need to be reading specialists. Academic and vocational teachers from the elementary grades through high school only need to recognize that by using the concrete tools of text and student writing, along with

teacher modeling and cooperative learning, they can help their students routinely achieve higher order thinking about their subject matter. Staff development in using these strategies is accomplished through hands-on demonstration and modeling. Any teacher can use these techniques. After participating in staff development in using reading and writing to learn, most teachers are immediately able to employ a variety of reading/writing strategies in their classrooms. Recent research has demonstrated that students can improve their reading levels by two or more years over a six month time period when exposed to learning through these strategies (Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko, & Mueller, 2001). Which teachers would *not* want to teach this way?

Before, During, and After?

Even though it is convenient to think of **M**otivation, **A**cquisition, and E**X**tension all happening in a separate phase of the lesson, it is important to note that the process is not all that neat. Though these terms are well suited to characterizing the essential elements of each of the before, during, and after phases of content area reading, the processes of each of the three are not so limited as to occur in only one time period of the class.

Motivation – based on reducing the avoidance of failure – is also occurring while students are doing the silent reading and afterward as well. During reading, students are free to process the text in personal, non-threatening ways. Even though the text may be significantly above the reading level of any given student, that student has the opportunity to struggle in his own personal way to make sense of the reading. If the teacher has done enough in the pre-reading phase of the class, the content will not be new to the student, and the student will know what s/he is looking for in the reading. Thus, the task will be concrete and perceived as doable by the student. No other person in the room will know exactly how, or how well, each student is reading.

After the reading, students typically work in small groups to construct meaning from the text. The support of cooperative peers helps to reduce the anxiety that might otherwise result from uncertainty about interpretation. Thus, **M**otivation, the striving for success and avoidance of failure, is aided throughout the lesson, before, during, and after the reading.

Acquisition of both content and skills occurs throughout the lesson as well. Simply by immersing students in a learning framework that repeatedly works to help them succeed in learning difficult and complex ideas, the teacher is allowing for students to acquire a sense of how to go about the life-long skill of strategically probing text for understanding. By repeatedly going through the process of doing pre-reading activities to get ready for reading, silently reading to purposefully process text, and cooperatively processing and reorganizing the information after the reading, students, without even being aware of it, are acquiring the ability to do so independently.

E**X**tension is the after-reading phase of the class in which students work cooperatively to process the text they have just read. It is the process of thinking beyond what was known prior to the reading in the **M**otivation phase of the class, and even what was found during the reading in the **A**cquisition phase of the class. Without the first two phases of the class, there can be no extension. Thus, the third phase of the lesson, by its very nature, has its roots in the pre-reading and during-reading phases of the class.

PREPARING TEACHERS

- *TWO TO THREE FULL DAYS OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT*
  - Three hours is not enough.
  - Constructivist instruction is best learned through constructivist staff development.

- *SUPPORT*
  - Follow up staff development/Modeling
  - In-house expertise
  - Peer coaching/peer teaching
  - Make it part of the school's culture
  - Model

- *CLEAR EXPECTATIONS*
  - Let them know how reading and writing should be implemented in their lesson plans.
  - It is not a once-a-month activity.
  - It is not a two-strategy activity.

- *GATHER DATA*
  - Compare before/after achievement
  - Comparison Group Studies
  - Survey students/faculty

PRESENTATION NOTES – FOUR SUCCESSES:

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